



NORTH CAROLINA ■ ASSOCIATION OF ■ SOIL & WATER ■ CONSERVATION ■
DISTRICTS

May 1, 2008

Representative Jim Crawford, co-chair
Joint Legislative Program Evaluation
Oversight Committee
N.C. State Legislature
Room 1326, Legislative Building
Raleigh, N.C. 27601

Also sent to:
Senator Hartsell
Representative Saunders
Senator Clodfelter

Honorable Representative Crawford:

As president of the NC Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts I would like to respond to the proposed transfer of properties from the NC Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services to the University system. Although the study does show efficiencies and cost savings to consolidate properties and services, the study looked at the facilities as a research issue only. These farms are used for much more.

First we are in a period of strong support for farmland, forestland and natural area preservation. The review did not look at a broad range of uses other than strictly research. I personally remember when the farms raised food for state facilities and under good management they were successful. We may want to take this on again as a commodity development, training and job creation for prisons, vocational schools, hospitals and food kitchen programs.

The issue may not be having these valuable properties as monetary assets to the state but how they are managed to maximize public benefits. For example the forestlands will be good testing grounds for cellulose and bio-fuels. They should not only be considered by the University system, but other forestry agencies that may have great ideas. Some of these farms can become needed parks, environmental learning centers, community gardens, watershed protection areas or just high quality open space. The committee should demand good fiscally strong management, but it should not be left to the University to determine the land holding on research only.

A great example of how these farms can change with time is the farm at NCA&T. A decade ago this property had animal waste violations, eroded fields and was in disrepair. Instead of getting

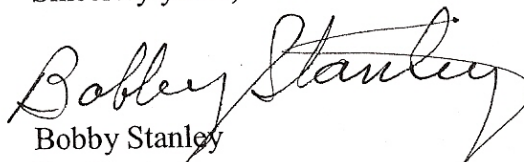
rid of the facility, they took a new approach and the farm is now a model for innovative 20th Century agriculture.

Before lands are transferred from one agency to another and put on the auction block based solely on research, we need a broader review. Insist on good efficient management and fiscal responsibility, but involve everyone, including citizens and local government to make the best public use for each facility. In the future it may be impossible to buy such properties.

I personally live in Columbus County near the Border Belt Research Farm. I have seen good research, the staff has helped farmers through difficult times and with new ideas and thousands of people have participated in educational activities. I am sure, in my own county, we can utilize this facility to its fullest, in partnership with NCDACS and the Universities, with ideas that were never discussed. A decision based on research alone is too narrow an approach.

I look forward to the committee discussions.

Sincerely yours,


Bobby Stanley
President